May 13, 1988

Dear Members and other Friends,

It is with much regret that I'm writing to inform you that the issue of DOUBLETALK which you recently received will be the last newsletter published by The Friends of Tom and Colin Baker. At the beginning of the year I acquired a long-term, part-time job in addition to my full-time job, and though I've tried for the past several months to juggle both jobs and still find the necessary 20+ hours per week to keep FTCB going, I've finally been forced to conclude that it will no longer be possible for me to do so without jeopardizing both my work and my health.

Many of you are aware that for over two years now I've essentially run the club single-handedly. Though I very much appreciate the offers of help I've received from some of you, I've been unable to find a way for anyone to be of significant assistance on a long-distance basis. Since neither sharing the workload nor turning the reins over to someone else appears to be feasible, I now find myself with no choice but to disband the club. My enthusiasm for Tom and Colin and their work, and the friends I've made and skills I've developed during my five-year involvement in fandom have been extremely important to me, and this has been one of the most difficult decisions I've ever had to make--but it has become the only possible decision, since I'm no longer able to devote to the club the time and energy it needs and deserves.

If you've renewed recently you will find your uncashed check enclosed. Due to time constraints I'm unable to compile another issue of DOUBLETALK, but I'm enclosing four pages of xeroxed information and have counted this mailing as equivalent to a newsletter for the purpose of calculating refunds. If your membership expires 9/88 or later, a refund of the balance of your dues is owed to you and you will find it enclosed. These refunds have been carefully calculated, but please contact me if you have questions regarding the amount owed to you. If anyone is unable to cash their refund check (e.g., if you don't have a checking account), if you will return it to me I'll send cash instead.

I recently placed bulk orders for Colin's audio tapes on behalf of all who ordered them, and I will forward your tapes to you as soon as I receive them (hopefully by the end of June). The group contribution to the Wildlife Hospitals Trust (hedgehog hospital) for Colin's birthday is also still "on," and $175 has been contributed so far. I hope more of you will choose to participate in that project, especially since it will be our last opportunity to contribute to charity as a group. I've found a wonderful hedgehog birthday card in which I will list the names of all contributors before sending it to Colin with our bank draft, and at that time I will send a photocopy of the card to each contributor. The front of the card says, "Why did the hedgehog cross the road?" If you want to know what's inside--and it's really cute--make a contribution before the May 31st deadline and you'll receive a copy!

In conclusion, I would like to extend my gratitude one last time to each of you who has provided support to the club, and also special thanks to both Tom and Colin for being such a source of joy in my life and also the lives of so many of my friends and acquaintances during the past five years.

Sincerely,

Laurie

Laurie Yadon

In the shadow of the Doctor

By JULIAN COLE

TOM BAKER is always more than prepared for the Dr Who fans who still ask for his autograph. He is never without a sheaf of photographs of himself, ready to hand out after he has signed his name. "Never trust a popular actor who doesn't walk around with a few pictures of himself," he says. "It means he doesn't believe in his own delusions."

This habit of anticipating the impromptu requests of fans neatly illustrates Tom Baker's dilemma: he is a popular actor, but one who would prefer to be more popular.

Tom spent six years as Dr Who, wreathed in the distinctive brightly-coloured coils of a pythonesque scarf. It was a period which brought him fame — but, he insists, leaves him today with little fortune and virtually no television work. "I've mainly done theatre in recent years because I'm virtually unemployable on television," he said. "No one is going to want me on television, I'm typecast."

It is, perhaps, surprising that Tom Baker should still be afflicted by that particular actor's curse, since it is now eight years since he stopped playing Dr Who. But he insists he has no regrets. "There's no point in regretting it. I just thought I'd be the one to break it; but I didn't."

Thus mainly spurned by television, Tom has turned to theatre. Last year, he had a lengthy spell in the West End, playing Inspector Goole in a long-running revival of An Inspector Calls. Now he is appearing at Greenwich Theatre in the premiere of The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940, by John Bishop.

The play, a hit in New York last year, is a comedy thriller inspired by 1940s movies. It is set in an isolated country mansion, which becomes snow-bound while packed with people auditioning for a new Broadway musical. And then the murders start.

"It's a comedy but it's also a thriller, where murders happen," says Tom, who is playing Ken de la Maze, director of the Broadway show.

Enthusiasm

The play appealed to Tom because it is a new piece. "When you get to my age, you mainly get offered revivals," he said, pointing to Frank in Educating Rita, Mr Hardcastle in She Stoops To Conquer, at the National Theatre, and Priestley's Inspector Goole. "Last year I was even asked to do Deathrap," he said, with a faint shudder.

"When I was sent the script I read it and thought 'Yes, this is funny, very funny'. Then I asked who was in it, and they said Sheila Steafel, Simon Cadell and Margaret Courtenay. I said I'd like to do it. They are all people I admire," he added.

Despite his enthusiasm for the play, Tom says it will almost cost him money to appear at Greenwich Theatre. "They're hardly paying enough to cover my rail fares," he said. "I live down in Kent and it's going to cost me about £70 a week. I'm not complaining — just pointing out the situation."

But he does stress that acting is not making him a rich man. "I can't make a living as an actor, I can't support myself as an actor," he insists. "I have to subsidise it with other work." This takes the form of voice-overs for TV adverts, lucrative when you can get them, and other 'business' acting, such as promotional videos for companies.

WHEN Tom Baker speaks, he leans forward and stares at you with large, critical eyes with an almost uncomfortable intensity. It can take a little getting used to, especially as he is a tall man, with strong aquiline feature. At 54, his hair is neater and more grey than in his publicity pictures.

He is a man of undeniable presence, and a surprising sense of self-irony. Before our interview, I had been told by a number of people that Tom Baker could be "difficult". A public relations man once told me that he introduced himself to the reputedly fiery actor with the words "How nice to meet you, Mr Baker." To which the actor responded: "You won't think that for long."

The Tom Baker you meet today seems to have mellowed — or, at least, is keen to give the impression that has done so. He is, he insists, at his most content in the lulls between work. Then he retreats to his house in Kent, where he has 10 cats, "mostly Burmese."

He grew up in Liverpool, and started acting more than 30 years ago, after two years National Service. It was, he says, a lot easier to get work in those days.

His early career included a two and a half year spell at the original National Theatre, working under Laurence Olivier. After that, he appeared in numerous plays and a number of films, including Pasolini's Canterbury Tales. In 1974, he was cast in the title role for The Trial of Oscar Wilde. In the same year he stepped into the Tardis as Dr Who. And life was never quite the same.

Tom says he has no idea what he will be doing when the Greenwich run ends. "I never make plans," he said. He then added that he is not in a position to make plans or demands. "Just like any other inadequate," he said, surprisingly. The rather dismissive self-adhesive label is one he applies a number of times during our interview. He gives the impression of being a man who appears successful to the outside world, but who doesn't particularly feel that way to himself.

Despite this, Tom is clearly proud that he has stayed the course and not quit acting to "write, direct or open an antiques shop." And although he says the TV work has dried up, he put in a nice cameo performance last year as a whiskey priest in The Life And Loves of a She Devil. "There are opportunities on TV but a lot of it really isn't me. I'm not really very good at what passes for TV drama today, all those police series, they don't interest me."

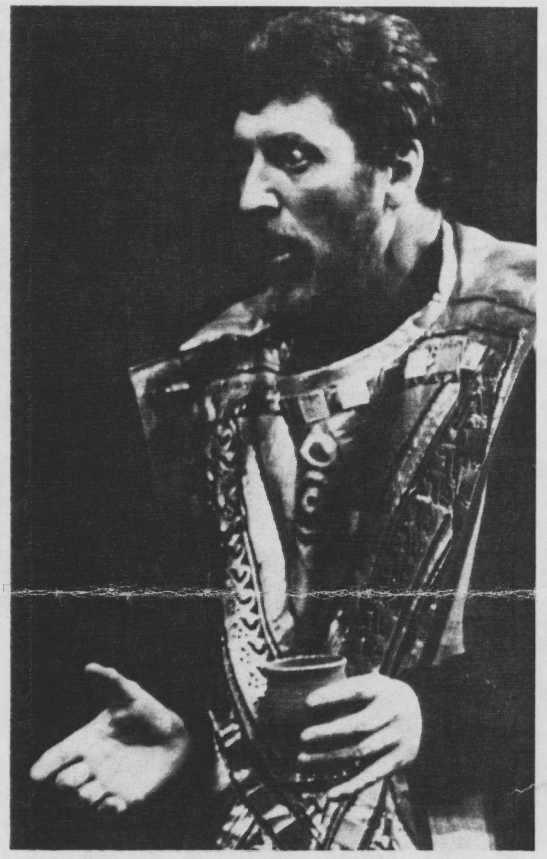
Asked if he has any ambitions, Tom thought for a moment and then replied: "I can't say I have, really. I'd just like to be a big glossy star." Some time back, he asked his agent to try and get him on Soap, but nothing came of it. So would he like to be in Dallas or Dynasty? "I'd love it, to be in one of those big zonking soap operas."

It is one of those ironies of life that Dr Who programmes starring Tom Baker are still showing across America. The very series which Tom says has blighted his TV career in Britain is still making his name in the United States.

A bonus is that the actor could, if he wished, spend half his life jetting to Dr Who conferences, enjoying the drinks and the adulation. He has done this a number of times, although the adulation for the Dr can wear thin.

At home, Tom Baker is still constantly recognised as Dr Who. Just before this interview, he says he was ringed by secretaries wanting his autograph. Naturally, then all received a photograph too.

[Deptford & Peckham Mercury, 3/17/88]



Tom as Macbeth at the Shaw Theatre in 1973

from The Stage and Television Today, 4/7/88

GREENWICH

The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940

AN OFF-BROADWAY hit last year, The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940 might well repeat its success here, for it is of the genre of Something's Afoot, though it has a lot in common with The Cat and the Canary. It is a neatly tied grab bag of Hollywood cliches, set in an old dark house on the Hudson, with a lily-livered young man who gains courage more by accident than design – the kind of role Bob Hope played to perfection in the forties – a chorus girl who turns out to be in naval intelligence, a sprinkling of bizarre and eccentric characters and one or two Nazi saboteurs.

At one time or another all of them disappear into secret passages behind bookcases, a couple of them are murdered and most are in danger of being killed. As they have been lured to the house on the promise of being auditioned for a Broadway musical, there is also a theatrical element, what with a megalomaniac director, an unpopular producer, the composer and lyricist, in addition to the chorus girl and the cowardly comic.

The fun is more fast than furious and the plot vanishes as swiftly as those spirited behind the bookcase. But it has an engaging innocence with camp overtones and the author, John Bishop, occasionally comes up with a genuinely funny line, taken full advantage of by an experienced cast under the direction of Peter Farago.

Of these, the honours undoubtedly fall to Simon Cadell, demonstrating all the skills of the night club comedian and proving that he is now in the front rank of our comedy players. But one cannot ignore the mountainous figure of Margaret Courtenay, as the hostess of German ancestry, Robert Austin and Sheila Steafel as the authors, Tom Baker as a director in the van Stroheim mould, Maria Friedman as the gutsy ingenue and Simone, or, if you prefer, Simon Butteriss – and there is a big hint if you want one. Peter Rice is responsible for conjuring up the typical Hollywood mystery setting, with dogs howling and the snow piling up against the door.

Going great guns: TOM BAKER and MARGARET COURTENAY. Picture – Zuleika Henry.

Peter Hepple

WHAT'S UP

The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940 was "off-beat, well-cast and unexpectedly enjoyable," according to London's Financial Times, but it closed at the Greenwich Theatre on May 7th and will not move to the West End. Tom wrote, "The play has proved too elusive for us and the critics spotted it. The younger members of the cast are very disappointed, but I'm not so down." Tom's character, the producer Ken de la Maize, wasn't the sort of "larger than life" role that Tom usually plays--though he did turn out to be the "Stage Door Slasher" who murdered chorus girls because his father had left his mother and run off with a dancer!

As of May 7th Tom reported no work in sight, and in fact said that he would rather not do another play for a while. He was offered a Sherlock Holmes role in a touring production and said that he thought he would have done well in the role, but the offer made to him was insufficient to convince him to leave his wife, garden and cats for 12 weeks!

In the June 1986 Among Friends we reprinted the lovely dedication to Tom which appeared in Jacqueline Lichtenberg's book Farfetch. We recently received the following note from Ms. Lichtenberg concerning her newest novel, to be published by St. Martin's Press in October: "I thought you might be interested in Those of My Blood--another examination of what it's like to be very long-lived among humans. Tom Baker would make an interesting 'Abbot'--the elder vampire."

TALL TALES FROM TOM

Tom recently mentioned an incident which occurred when he read A Christmas Carol in the local church last Christmas. The church was packed--Tom said that there was an admission charge but that he had bought all of the tickets himself and given them away!--and he was in the midst of his 45-minute reading when the door to the church inched open. Tom and Sue's white cat, Willow, marched up the aisle to Tom and then sat staring up at him, which Tom says amused the congregation no end!

Tom also told the following story about a voice-over he recently recorded for Honeywell computers. He has recorded voice-overs for them before and explained that it normally takes him about 3 minutes to record one, but on this particular occasion it took about 30 minutes. The difference this time was that Honeywell had been taken over by another company, and the name of the new company consists of Honeywell followed by the name of the acquiring firm. The tag line which Tom had recorded for them previously was "designed well...built well...Honeywell." Tom said it took 38 takes for him to read with a straight face (or voice, as it were) the line: "designed well...built well...Honeywell...Bull"!

FILLING IN THE BLANKS

Tom has provided some information which has helped to fill in a couple of gaps in our listing of his professional credits. In Hay Fever in 1968, Tom played the role of Richard Greatham. During that same year, Tom played the character Black Will in Arden of Faversham.

● *HIGH CAMP: Tom Baker as the film director, with Margaret Courtenay as Elsa*

The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940, by John Bishop, at Greenwich Theatre

PETER Farago, who directs this American comedy, also has the stage version of 'Allo 'Allo to his credit. And it certainly shows.

For most of the first half, his direction shares much with the rusty-hinged wit of that dire French resistance farce.

After the interval, however, Mr Farago seems to have applied some inspirational oil to the creaking hinge. The action then swings freely.

Despite this rapid recovery, the production never really lives up to its promise. On paper, this sounded like a highly entertaining idea for a play. On stage, it is an enjoyably silly romp — but nothing like as funny as it should be.

John Bishop's play, a hit in New York last year, is a spoof on murder movies from the 1930s. It is a set in a snow-bound mansion. A gaggle of show people have been invited to the house, ostensibly to audition for a new musical.

Their host is Elsa von Grossenkneuten, whose surname, incidentally, is the cause of far too many 'Allo 'Allo style mispronunciation jokes. Elsa (Margaret Courtenay, camping it up with gusto) has actually invited her guests to the "audition" because she knows one of them to be a killer.

Two years earlier, the same creative team had worked on a musical where three chorus girls had been murdered by someone dubbed the "stage-door slasher."

Bishop's play is a high-camp farce, with bodies falling out of cupboards and into secret passages behind revolving bookcases. There are some neat ideas, like the man stabbed through a copy of Moby Dick. "That's remarkable — I couldn't even get half way through that," says Eddie McCuen, a touchingly unfunny comic (Simon Cadell, in expected good form).

A very strong cast also features Tom Baker as a director, forever rolling out the cast list for his unreleased movies. Sheila Steafel, is a lush lyricist, given the lovely garbled line: "It's like casting swearls before pine."

[Deptford & Peckham Mercury, 3/30/88]

Tom

[Photo compliments of Yorkshire Television (from The Book Tower)]

KIDS

by ESTHER RIPLEY

Happiness after cot death agony

Dr Who's a dad again

FORMER Dr Who Colin Baker and his wife Marion have a new baby daughter.

And their happiness brings hope to many heartbroken parents who, like them, have lived through the agony of a cot death.

As Marion cuddles baby Belinda and deals confidently with big sister Lucy, it's hard to imagine the dark days four years ago when their first baby, Jack, died suddenly in his cot at the age of just six weeks.

He was a victim of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome — the biggest killer of babies under six months, claiming the lives of one in every 500.

Since they lost Jack, the Bakers have been fund-raising for the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, a charity dedicated to finding out why.

EXCLUSIVE

"We do feel more confident as parents now," says Marion. "We have had a baby that survived. Lucy is nearly three and still with us.

"But these are early days and I don't know if I'm going to spend sleepless nights by the cot with my new baby."

Parents who are worried are often reassured by a monitor which is attached to a baby and sounds a warning if breathing falters.

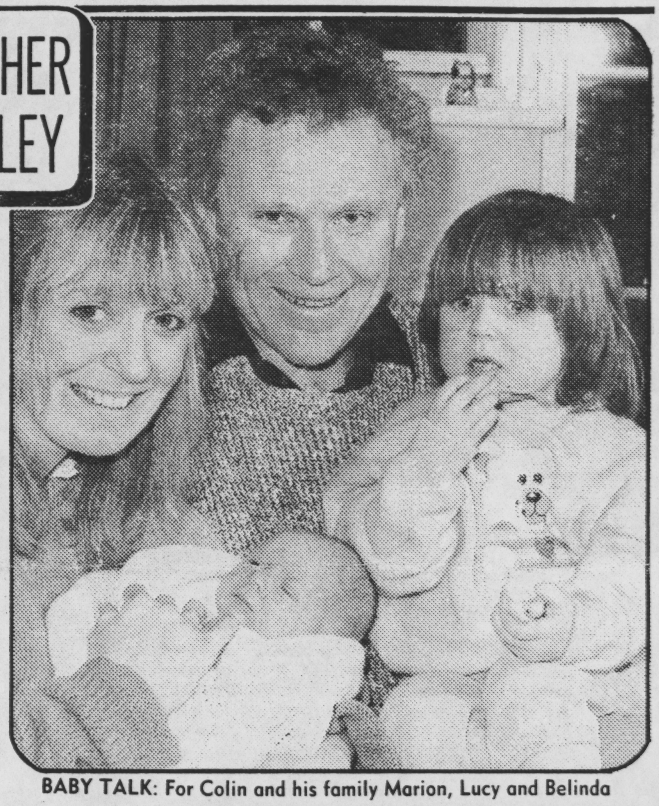
"We were offered monitors, but to me that held out the possibility that a cot death might happen again," says Colin.

And Marion adds: "I feel I want everything to be as normal as possible."

Normal for Marion means fitting family life around Colin's hectic work schedule.

Belinda's birth was induced because she was nearly two weeks late, and Marion chose a Sunday. That was the only day Colin, who is touring in the play Deathtrap, could be there!

[Daily Mirror (London) 3/18/88]



BABY TALK: For Colin and his family Marion, Lucy and Belinda

From "Why Dr Who Colin finds the wild parties boring" (Birmingham Daily News, 3/25/88):

WHEN former Dr Who star Colin Baker was an up and coming actor, he was dazzled by the never-ending round of showbiz parties.

Now, aged 44, he has swopped the champagne glass for a baby's bottle to settle down to the life of a respectable dad.

"I'm a firm family man now," said Colin. "I thought the parties were exciting at the time but now I find them deathly boring."

And his actress wife Marion Wyatt was happy to leave the artificiality that surrounds the profession behind, when she gave birth to her daughter Lucy three years ago.

Excerpted from the February 28th Sunday Mercury (Birmingham):

But after curtain-fall he will hurtle down the motorway to Buckinghamshire to help his actress wife Marion Wyatt with their new-born daughter Belinda.

Belinda was born a week ago and proud dad told me: "I'll certainly be helping to change nappies and that sort of thing."

A self-confessed fan of nursery food, Colin is also a dab hand at rustling up sausage and mash or treacle tart for his three-year-old daughter Lucy.

FINALLY--WHERE TO GET THOSE CAT PINS!

Some of you have asked whether it's possible to purchase cat pins like the ones Colin wore on DOCTOR WHO. Colin has provided the following information:

"Maggy Howard is a professional artist who paints life size wooden companion boards of peoples' pets which sit realistically in the home making an amusing talking point for friends. Colin Baker commissioned her to paint his five cats and his dog; and consequently to design and make the small portrait brooches or 'Eric' and 'Weeble' for the Dr Who series "Trial of a Timelord" which are now available to collectors. Sold as a pair, numbered in series, dated and signed by the artist at £7 (sterling only) from: Maggy Howard, Manor Farmhouse, Little Brington, Northants. NN7 4HS, England. If at the same time you would like details and prices of Maggy's other work, please say so when requesting your 'Dr Who' brooches."

If you wish to order the pins you might consider writing first to ask whether the above price includes overseas postage.

MORE BABY TALK

At Magnum Opus Con 3 in March, Colin mentioned that he and Marion weren't sure after all whether they would choose Jane as Belinda's middle name; however, he has more recently affirmed that they have done so. When asked how Lucy feels about having a little sister, Colin said she likes it. He went on to explain that Lucy is very possessive, in the sense that Belinda is her new toy. He said that one day when the family was visiting friends it was joked that perhaps they should leave Belinda there, and Lucy became quite upset!

AND MORE CROSSWITS!

On April 15th Colin was in Newcastle to film five more "Crosswits" programs which were to air beginning April 25th. He reports that this time he and his partners won all five programs and that in addition he helped three of his partners win vacations by successfully completing "crossfire" rounds. It's not surprising that he has already been invited to film yet more "Crosswits" shows!

Thriller just too much

SHOCKING murder scenes proved to be too much for one member of the audience at Lincoln's Theatre Royal last night when she fainted during a thriller.

A theatre spokesman said that during a performance of Deathtrap, starring Anita Harris and Colin Baker, a woman fainted during one of the five murder scenes.

Well, folks--Colin's American accent is thoroughly believable! British members of the audience have been overheard making comments such as: "Colin Baker isn't American--is he?" "No, but his accent is." "I know that!"

As in CORPSE!, Colin is onstage virtually throughout the play, and his portrayal of the dried-up writer/cold-blooded killer Sidney Bruhl is excellent. Colin plays the role a bit differently from one performance to the next, primarily by varying the degree of remorse Sidney feels--or doesn't feel--after murdering his wife (played by Anita Harris, pictured above with Colin).

This production is staged somewhat differently than the movie; for example, all of the action takes place in Sidney's study. Also, the film's controversial kiss between Sidney and his protege Clifford Anderson (played in the movie by Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve, respectively) has not been included in this production. Colin says that quite a few people (usually gay men!) have questioned its omission, but he points out that it wasn't in the original playtext and he seems rather relieved that he doesn't have to engage in that particular activity eight times a week! (One night he appeared to derive a certain amount of enjoyment from toying rather excessively with the hairs on the back of one of the hands of the actor who plays Clifford, however! Afterwards Colin explained that he had done so because the fellow is a rather "busy" sort of actor and he had found him particularly annoying that night!)

There has been a change in DEATHTRAP's touring schedule since the last issue of DOUBLETALK was printed. During the week of May 23-28 it will be performed at the Theatre Royal in Winchester rather than the Wyvern Theatre in Swindon.

☆**LOOK carefully at the man in the supermarket who refuses to accept a paper bag with his purchases, it could be former Dr Who Colin Baker who admits: "I am an obsessive ecologist. I believe in wasting none of nature's resources." Recycle the Daleks.**

[from Today (London), 3/23/88]

CONVENTION UPDATE

As reported last time, subject to professional commitments Colin plans to attend TARDISCON '88, to be held August 13-14 in St. Louis. For more information send an SASE to: TARDISCON '88, P.O. Box 733, St. Louis, MO 63188.

Also subject to professional commitments, Colin plans to be aboard the Doctor Who Silver Anniversary Cruise which is scheduled for November 20-25 (Thanksgiving week). The 5-night cruise will depart from Miami and stop at Key West, Cozumel and Cancun. The other guests who are scheduled to be aboard are John Nathan-Turner, Sarah Sutton, Janet Fielding, Frazer Hines, and Gary Downie. For more information call (305) 921-2910 or write to: Doctor Who Silver Anniversary Cruise, 1632 Van Buren Street #2, Hollywood, FL 33020.

Colin will be 45 on June 8th.

Happy Birthday, Colin!

VINTAGE PHOTO DEPT.: Suiting up! Thanks to Colin for lending us this photo, which was taken while he was preparing for his first parachute jump with the Red Devils.